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MEMBERS OF THE PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD ARRESTED, CHARGED WITH RACKETEERING AND CONSPIRACY TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO TERRORISTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Attorney General John Ashcroft, Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez of the Middle District of Florida, and James F. Jarboe, FBI Special Agent In Charge of the Tampa Field Office, today announced the arrest of four members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a designated foreign terrorist organization, following the return of a 50-count indictment by a federal grand jury in Tampa, Florida.

The indictment, returned Feb. 19 and unsealed today, charges a total of eight defendants under RICO with operating a racketeering enterprise from 1984 until the present that engaged in a number of violent activities. In addition, the indictment charges conspiracy within the United States to kill and main persons abroad, conspiracy to provide material support and resources to PIJ, conspiracy to violate emergency economic sanctions, engaging in various acts of interstate extortion, perjury, obstruction of justice and immigration fraud. If convicted, the defendants face up to life in prison.

“The individuals named in this indictment play a central role in global terrorism – they are ‘material supporters’ of foreign terrorist organizations. They finance, extol and assist acts of terror,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft. “Our message to them is clear: We make no distinction between those who carry out terrorist attacks and those who knowingly finance, manage or supervise terrorist organizations. We will bring justice to both.”

The defendants arrested today are:

- Sami Amin Al-Arian, 45, born in Kuwait, a resident of Temple Terrace, Fla., and a professor in the College of Engineering at the University of South Florida. Al-Arian was the alleged leader of the PIJ in the United States, and Secretary of the “Shura Council,” or worldwide governing group of the PIJ;
- Sameeh Hammoudeh, 42, born in the West Bank, a resident of Temple Terrace, Fla., an instructor and student at USF, and administrator at the Islamic Academy of Florida. Hammoudeh was an alleged member of the PIJ in the Tampa area;
- Hatim Naji Fariz, 30, born in Puerto Rico, a resident of Spring Hill, Fla., and a manager for a medical clinic. Fariz also was an alleged PIJ member; and
- Ghassan Zayed Ballut, 41, born in the West Bank, a resident of Tinley Park, Illinois, and a small business owner. Ballut was an alleged member of a PIJ cell in Chicago, Illinois.

The other defendants charged in the indictment remain overseas. They are:

- Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, 45, born in the Gaza Strip in the Occupied Territories, a resident of Damascus, Syria, current worldwide leader of the PIJ and a member of the PIJ's Shura Council. Shallah, formerly of Tampa, is former Executor Director of the World Islam and Studies Enterprise (WISE) and a former instructor at USF. Shallah was designated by the United States as a Specially Designated Terrorist in November 1995;
- Bashir Musa Mohammed Nafi, 50, born in Egypt, a resident of Oxfordshire, England, and a professor at Muslim College, formerly associated with WISE. Nafi was the leader of the PIJ in the United Kingdom, a member and founder of the PIJ, and a member of the Shura Council;
- Mohammed Tasir Hassan Al-Khatib, 46, born in the Gaza Strip in the Occupied Territories, a resident in the Beirut, Lebanon area, formerly associated with Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP) in Tampa. Al-Khatib was Treasurer of the PIJ and a member of the Shura Council; and
- Abd Al Aziz Awda, 52, born in Gabaly, Israel, a resident of the Gaza Strip and Imam of the Al Qassam Mosque in the Gaza Strip. Awda was a founder and spiritual leader of the PIJ and a member of the Shura Council. In January 1995, Awda was designated by the United States as a specially designated terrorist.

The indictment alleges that Al-Arian and the seven other defendants used locations and facilities within the United States to serve as the North American base for PIJ, a group that was declared a "specially designated terrorist" in January 1995 because of the threat it posed to the Middle East peace process, and designated as a "foreign terrorist organization" by the State Department in October 1997. The indictment describes a decade-long conspiracy in which Al-Arian, Shallah, the late Fathi Shiqaqi and others used a number of U.S.-based entities to communicate and support PIJ worldwide, to help solve internal PIJ disputes and financial problems, to help disseminate PIJ claims of responsibility for specific terrorist attacks in Israel, and to raise funds within the United States for violent jihad.

A written PIJ "manifesto" uncovered during the course of the investigation outlines the goals and command structure of the group. The manifesto stated that the PIJ was led by a Secretary General and a Shura Council, a central advisory committee. The manifesto rejected "any peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause, and the affirmation of the Jihad solution and the martyrdom style as the only choice for liberation." The manifesto indicated that the only purpose of PIJ was to destroy Israel and end all Western influence (of the "Great Satan-America") in the region regardless to the cost of the inhabitants. The manifesto states that those who died while committing acts of violence are "martyrs," and an individual who was arrested was described as a "detainee."

The indictment alleges that the PIJ constitutes a RICO enterprise, which has engaged in multiple acts of murder and extortion in Israel and the Occupied Territories (Gaza Strip and West Bank) as part of a stated terrorist campaign to destroy Israel.

The indictment describes numerous terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings, committed by individuals associated with the PIJ, which resulted in the murders of over 100 people in Israel and the Occupied Territories, including two U.S. citizens, Alisa Flatow, age 20, and Shoshama Ben-Yishai, age 16. Other PIJ-assisted terrorist attacks include:

- the April 6, 1994 incident in Afula, Israel, in which PIJ operatives detonated a car bomb next to a public bus, killing nine people and injuring approximately 50 others;
- the Sept. 4, 1994 drive-by shooting near Mirage Junction, Gaza, in which PIJ killed one person and injured several others;
- the Nov. 11, 1994 suicide bombing near Netzarim Junction, Gaza, which killed three people and injured 11.
- the Jan. 25, 1995 murder of 22 people in a double suicide bombing at Beit Lid, Israel; and
- the June 5, 2002, suicide bombing in Haifa, Israel, which killed 20 and injured 50.

The indictment alleges and describes the roles played by the defendants and the activities in which they personally participated. The Tampa-based defendants established a PIJ cell using the structure and facilities of the University of South Florida and two other entities, WISE and ICP, as a cover to conceal their terrorist activities. The defendants then managed the affairs of the PIJ organization by, among others things: administering the financial affairs of the PIJ, including the acquisition and spending of funds; acting as communications facilitators to relay messages for PIJ members located in various countries, relating such things as announcement of PIJ terrorist attacks; acquiring secure communications equipment; and making false statements to the INS to assist terrorists and other PIJ members to enter and remain in the United States.

“Today, the spotlight of the Justice Department exposes members of a secret, U.S.-based Palestinian Islamic Jihad cell,” stated Paul I. Perez, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida. “The indictment unsealed today specifically sets forth what we have learned about the alleged activities of these individuals for the past 15 years as major terrorist financial supporters who took advantage of the freedoms of an open society to help foster anti-Western violence.”

“Today’s arrests underscore the vigilance of the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force to dismantle and disrupt those who support terrorism,” said James Jarboe, FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Tampa Field Office. “These arrests also reflect the continued cooperation among the FBI and other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies as they work together in the JTTF.”

The investigation of this matter continues. The investigation was conducted by the Tampa Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Walter E. Furr, III, Deputy Chief of the Organized Crime Section; Terry A. Zitek, Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney; and Cherie Krigsmann, trial attorney, Counterterrorism Section of the Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice.

This investigation is part of DOJ's continuing efforts to identify, disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks. Some of the other actions taken by the Department to cut off terrorist resources and financing include:

- More than 70 investigations into terrorism financing;
- 23 convictions to date;
- 36 entities designated as terrorist organizations;
- \$113 million frozen in financial assets of 62 organizations that support terrorism;
- In Detroit, Buffalo, Portland and Seattle, we have shut down terrorist cells providing material support to terrorists;
- In Illinois, Enaam Arnaout, the executive director of the Benevolence International Foundation, pleaded guilty and admitted fraudulently obtaining charitable donations and using them to provide financial assistance to individuals engaged in violence and terrorism;
- In Dallas, a federal grand jury indicted a senior leader of Hamas for conspiring to violate U.S. laws that prohibit dealings in terrorist funds;
- In Detroit, a federal grand jury indicted 11 people on charges of conspiracy to commit a pattern of racketeering activity. A portion of the profits from their activities were intended to support Hizballah, another designated foreign terrorist organization;
- In North Carolina, a federal jury convicted Mahamad Hammoud of providing material support to Hizballah;
- In San Diego, three defendants were indicted for conspiring to trade drugs for weapons which they intended to sell to al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan;
- In Houston, four defendants were charged in a drugs-for-weapons plot to deliver \$25 million worth of weapons to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC, a Colombian paramilitary group also identified as a foreign terrorist organization;
- In Seattle, Hussain Alshafei and five others were charged with conspiracy to launder money. The indictment alleges that the defendant transmitted at least \$12 million to Iraq, in clear violation of laws that prohibit direct or indirect transfers of money to Iraq;
- In Buffalo, a federal grand jury indicted three individuals on charges of operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, with the objective of sending money to Yemen;
- In Boston, a federal jury convicted Mohamed Hussein of two counts of knowingly running an illegal money transmitting process;

- In Kentucky, a complaint and arrest warrant were issued for Mohamed Ould Sidi Mohamed, charging him with operating an unlicensed money transmitting business;
- In addition, in Kentucky, a jury convicted Mulamin Turay, a native of Sierra Leone, of operating an unlicensed money transmitting business and of structuring bank transactions to avoid currency transaction reports;
- And in Brooklyn, 15 defendants were indicted on charges of operating an unlicensed money transmittal business that funneled millions of dollars to Yemen. Fourteen have pleaded guilty.

“We have an extensive record in breaking up terrorist financing,” Attorney General Ashcroft stated. “The record makes clear: We will hunt down the sources of terrorist blood money, we will shut down these sources, and we will ensure that both terrorists and their financiers meet the same, swift, certain justice of the United States of America.”

The investigation of this matter continues. If anyone has pertinent information about the PIJ or its members or about terrorism in general, they are urged to call the Federal Bureau of Investigation at (813) 273-4566.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of federal criminal laws. Every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

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